

ICPS newsletter®

Reforming the European Neighborhood Policy: Ukraine must act

On 7 December 2006, ICPS held a roundtable called "Ukraine's European Policy in the Context of European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) Reform" that the Centre organized on the occasion of the visit of ICPS Supervisory Board Chair, ex-President of Poland Alexander Kwasniewski to Ukraine. Realizing that the EU's Neighborhood Policy has not yet become an effective instrument for spurring democratization and economic modernization in neighboring countries, the European Union is ready for reforms. To benefit from the ENP the most, Ukraine must join European debates both at the level of the European Commission and at the level of individual Member States

The prospect of EU membership has become a powerful driver of change in post-communist Europe, fostering democratization and economic modernization. However, after its biggest expansion in May 2004, the European Union is not prepared to offer the prospect of membership to other countries who want to join, such as Ukraine, in the near future. Instead, Brussels is establishing cooperation with neighboring countries under the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). This offers prospects of deeper integration without membership: liberalization of trade, cooperation in the security sector and foreign policy, sectoral integration, and joint investment projects.

The EU's Neighborhood Policy is up for reform

However, in its current form, the ENP has failed to become an effective alternative to the enlargement policy. Without the obligations imposed by membership, the EU's diplomatic, trade and technical assistance has a far smaller impact on transformation processes in these neighboring countries.

The EU understands that its ENP has not proved as effective as an instrument for contributing to democratization and economic modernization as it had hoped. Poland, Lithuania and Germany have presented proposals for reforming the Policy. Germany has even declared reform of the ENP as one of the key objectives of its upcoming EU presidency. All three proposals support the idea that the doors to the EU should not be closed to new countries wanting to join. Moreover, the European Commission recently published its position

on ENP reform, stating that cooperation with neighbors must place more emphasis on expanded free trade, sectoral cooperation in transport and energy, and political cooperation.

The ENP and Ukraine: More questions than answers

According to ICPS Director of European Programs Olha Shumylo, Ukraine needs to become more actively involved in the debate in Europe on reforming the ENP in order to gain the maximum benefits from this policy. At the same time, given that membership prospects in the near future are nil, Ukraine should make use of the opportunities that the EU is offering at the moment—expanded free trade and sectoral cooperation.

What can Ukraine do to influence the debate on reforming the ENP and get what it wants from the Policy? How can the ENP become a framework for reform and economic development in Ukraine? What assistance mechanisms should be used to implement the Policy? Participants in this roundtable—top Ukrainian politicians and experts, as well as heads of foreign missions in Ukraine—tried to answer these questions.

A pragmatic approach to the Neighborhood Policy

Deputy Presidential Chief-of-Staff Oleksandr Chaliy said Ukraine should apply the most pragmatic approach to cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. On one hand, Ukraine is prepared to support the German proposal to reforming the European Neighborhood Policy. On the other, Ukraine must clearly

know what advantages it might gain in upcoming negotiations on the new basic agreement between Ukraine and the EU. According to Mr. Chaliy, there will be an essential demand on the Ukrainian side to include an item in this agreement that would open prospects for Ukraine's membership in the EU.

According to Vladyslav Kaskiv, a member of the Political Council of PORA, a civic party, the key problem is lack of consensus within the EU itself, not only regarding Ukraine's membership, but regarding the EU's geopolitical ambitions as a whole. To change this skeptical mood in Europe, Ukraine needs to work actively, said ICPS Supervisory Board Chair and ex-President of Poland Alexander Kwasniewski. In addition, Mr. Kwasniewski expressed the conviction that Ukraine must make use of Germany's upcoming six-month presidency to formulate a concept for the country to gain membership in the European Union.

During this roundtable, the official position of the Government was voiced by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Andriy Veselovskiy: Ukraine needs to thoroughly study the proposals for reforming the European Neighborhood Policy and make the maximum use of them. However, the country must not forget about its main goal—full-fledged membership in the EU.

The main conclusion of this roundtable was that Ukraine must clearly realize that, to become a developed economy, it cannot just contemplate the processes that are taking place, but must act. "Acting" means to get actively involved in the debate on reforming the ENP, formulate what kind of a free trade agreement with the EU would be beneficial for Ukraine and negotiate accordingly, and—the main point—make use of all available opportunities for cooperation that are offered in the current format of relations with the EU while not forgetting about the ultimate goal—full-fledged membership in the European Union. ■

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Affecting party policies: Community organizations make progress

A conference called "The Impact of NGOs on Party Policies: Results and problems at the regional level" on 8 December was the wrap-up public event of the "Impact of NGOs on the Formulation and Implementation of Political Platforms" project. The main conclusion and, simultaneously, the achievement of this project is that, under the influence of community organizations, the media and other interest groups, the issues of formulating and implementing party policies at the local level have become more urgent and important for all participants in the policy-making process. At the same time, the activity of party organizations and local councils has become more open and transparent

A methodology for community organizations

One of the necessary pre-conditions for successful project implementation is to prepare a reliable methodological basis and to provide quality training for the people who will use it. ICPS specialists were given the task of "equipping" NGOs with technologies and instruments to reach the project's objectives.

With this aim, the Centre developed four methods that were turned into handbooks for those carrying out the project: a method for analyzing, evaluating and monitoring party platforms of political forces, and participants in Verkhovna Rada elections; a method for analyzing and evaluating election platforms of local branches of political parties and blocs; a method for monitoring the effectiveness of how local organizations of political parties and blocs fulfill their election platforms; and a method for evaluating (self-evaluating) the impact of NGOs on the formulation and implementation of party policies.

The majority of participants in this conference said the most valuable project output was precisely mastering ways to influence the formulation and implementation of party policies. According to the results of a poll that was carried out during this event, 93% of conference participants had "satisfied their hunger" for know-how.

In addition, the methods developed by ICPS are already being used in post-secondary institutions. Since 2005, the Method for analyzing, evaluating and monitoring party platforms of political forces, and participants in Verkhovna Rada elections has been included in the curriculum of a course called "Methods and Techniques for Policy Studies" offered at Donetsk National University.

The impact of NGOs on forming party policies

The main goal of this project was to engage community organizations and voters and to

prepare them to have an effective impact on the development and implementation of party policies.

It is no secret that the majority of election platforms in Ukraine have been developed without public participation. Current Ukrainian law does not allow for political parties and blocs to amend or change their platforms once territorial election commissions have registered them.

However, as proposals submitted by NGOs for improving election platforms were constructive and important, specific party organizations began to consider these proposals in their activity in some sense. For example, the Donetsk Oblast organizations of the Party of the Regions and Nasha Ukraina both developed more detailed Donetsk Oblast development programs and disseminated them among voters.

Public debates are a major form of positive pressure

NGOs organized public events with broad involvement of political parties and other interest groups. This made it possible to determine local problems that were identified as priorities in the majority of political platforms and reflected voter concerns.

For example, in Mykolayiv, priorities are to renew the operation of the local shipyard and to reduce environmental pollution. For Poltava, one priority is to resolve environmental problems related to the shutting down of a local waste-processing plant. In Vinnytsia, priorities are to draft a municipal development strategy and to adopt Statutes for the territorial community. And in Donetsk, priorities are to increase the effectiveness of local governments and to implement a regional economic development program.

The impact of NGOs on the implementation of party policies

With the help of monitoring and public debates, community organizations began to really see how political parties fulfill their

promises they make to voters during an election campaign. In addition, NGOs also helped establish feedback between the third sector and local branches of parties and communities.

During the project, NGOs were included in advisory councils attached to government bodies. As a result, the third sector was present at the majority of meetings of standing deputy commissions and local council sessions.

Project participants provided a continuous flow of information to voters on how party platforms and action programs are being fulfilled and how policies are being adopted and implemented. Because of this, voters became more interested in party platforms.

NGO participation in policy-making: A lot to work on

The issues of formulating and implementing party policies at the local level have gained more urgency and importance for all those involved in the policy-making process. At the same time, the activity of party organizations and local councils has become more open and transparent. Regional NGOs have gained experience in organizing public dialog and cooperating with political parties and other interest groups.

However, to strengthen the impact of NGOs on local policies, they need to continue to look for new ways to coordinate and motivate the activity of their organizations and other interest groups in Ukrainian society. One such approach was "An Appeal to National Deputies, Leaders of Political Parties, Local Governments, and Community Organizations" that was adopted by participants at the conference. This document proposes specific steps to improve the parliamentary-presidential form of government and the proportional system of voting.

ICPS implemented this project throughout 2006 with the support of the US-based Institute of Sustainable Communities (ISC) and the Ukraine Citizen Action Network (UCAN). This project was implemented jointly with the Centre's regional partners: the Donetsk Institute for Social Studies and Political Analysis, the Center for Social Studies (Poltava), the Podillia Center for Social Technologies (Vinnytsia), and the Mykolayiv Association of Business Employers.

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